

Houston Independent School District Project SMART

The Houston Independent School District (HISD) Project SMART (Strategies for Motivating and Rewarding Teachers) focuses on teacher effectiveness and growth in student learning at the campus (school) and individual teacher and principal levels. The project will serve 109 schools (out of 306) with at least 30 percent or more educationally disadvantaged students and 4,187 teachers.

Needs Assessment Results and General Information

HISD students are classified as 91.5 percent minority and 81.7 percent economically disadvantaged. The students in HISD are more likely than those in other districts to be limited English proficient or speakers of English as a second language and at-risk (35.5% and 67.1%, respectively). Compared to Texas as a whole, HISD students underperformed on the statewide Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS), demonstrated lower academic achievement on high school completion exams, and had lower graduation rates (75.8%). HISD's mean SAT score (934) falls below the Texas mean score (987).

HISD has a higher percentage of new teachers with zero to 5 years experience (39.6%) and those with 11 or more years experience (44.4%) but a lower percentage of teachers with 6-10 years experience (16.1%) than is seen statewide. Close to 37,000 Texas teachers leave the profession or retire each year, and the number of non-certified teachers increased to 13 percent in 2003. There was also a higher percentage of turnover (15.2%) compared to another large urban area, Dallas (14.1%).

Background

The HISD Project SMART performance-incentive plan for teachers focuses on teacher effectiveness and growth in student learning at both campus and individual teacher levels. Based on teacher, principal, and other stakeholder input, the revised performance-pay program plan for teachers and principals has been revised into the ASPIRE Award. This, in turn, will also allow HISD to increase and retain the number of effective teachers teaching poor, minority, and disadvantaged students in hard-to-staff subjects such as mathematics and science, increase principal effectiveness, and increase student achievement.

Incentives

The incentive structure comprises of three strands, which were updated in 2007.

STRAND I:

Campus value-added analysis of composite scores created using multiple years of data from the Stanford and TAKS across subjects and across grades. All instructional staff are eligible for \$250-\$500.

LOCATION(S)	Houston, Texas
AWARD DATE	November 2006
DURATION	5 years
PARTNERS	N/A

STRAND II:

Rewards core instructional staff for individual efforts at improving student academic performance at the classroom/student cohort level through the application of teacher-level or campus-level value-added analysis of student academic progress. In order to include more teachers, there are four parts of this strand to ensure the inclusion of the maximum number of core teachers in PK-12:

- Part A is used to give incentives to self-contained core subject teachers in elementary school grades 3-6 based on teacher value-added scores by subject, with awards ranging from \$150-\$1,500.
- Part B is used to give incentives to departmentalized elementary school and middle school core teachers in grades 3-8 based on teacher value-added scores by subject, with awards ranging from \$375-\$1,500.
- Part C gives incentives to core instructional teachers at the high school level based on campus department value-added scores by subject, with awards ranging from \$375-\$1,500.
- Part D gives incentives to EC-2nd grade teachers based on campus value-added scores for reading and math, with awards ranging from \$187.50-\$750.

STRAND III:

Rewards instructional staff for cooperative efforts at improving student performance at the campus level and for achieving or maintaining the Recognized or Exemplary performance of their students. There are two parts to this strand:

- Part A: Campus improvement, designed to reward instructional staff at schools whose students have exhibited significant improvement when compared to other similar schools across the state, and based on TEA Comparable Improvement. Awards range from \$250-\$1,000.
- Part B: Campus achievement, designed to reward instructional staff at schools whose students reach and maintain high levels of academic achievements, and based solely on TEA Accountability Ratings. The Houston Independent School Districts funds all rewards for Strand IIIB.

Principals will be eligible based on school performance in Strand I and Strand III, and on student value-added performance for Strand II. A principal's incentive amount is not to exceed \$3,000 of TIF funds.

Evaluation

Formative and summative evaluations will be conducted. Tune-series and two-group matched-comparison designs using quantitative and qualitative data will be used to determine the overall effectiveness of Project SMART via quarterly and annual evaluations. They will include data from student achievement and academic performance indicators, program implementation indicators, program context indicators, and assistant principal and principal leadership abilities.

Resources

Teacher Incentive Fund money will be used to implement Project SMART and will provide up to \$3,000 in incentives to teachers and administrators at participating schools. HISD will match \$7,788,909 (65% of TIF) to enable 100 percent HISD funding by year 6 and will further increase the total amount of award pay for teachers (\$7,300) and principals (\$9,000).

Data Systems

- Battelle for Kids has provided a database that allows teachers to verify and manage their “student linkages” to the students they provide with instruction, and district administration has provided Battelle for Kids with the data to load the system.
- The SAS® EVAAS® system of value-added data provides a more useful measure of teacher performance and student achievement by providing one value-added score per core subject for students, teachers, and campuses. The incorporation of the SAS® EVAAS® value-added data allows student achievement data to be used to measure effectiveness to simultaneously control for multiple socio-economic factors and differing levels of the historical learning of each student prior to entry into a teacher’s classroom. The incorporation of up to 3 years of student data makes the annual effectiveness scores of teachers less subject to fluctuation error and bias.

Year 2 Activities

Houston Independent School District contracted with SAS® EVAAS® to calculate the value-added scores used for district educational improvement and in the enhanced performance-pay model renamed ASPIRE Award. HISD paid out the award model for year 2 in January of 2008 (based on 2006-2007 data). Out of 4,077 eligible instructional staff in the 106 Project SMART schools that did not opt out, 3,578 received ASPIRE Awards. The total year 2 payout was \$24,118,696 for the entire district. Of that amount, \$2,688,751 was paid by the Teacher Incentive Fund, and \$21,429,945 was paid by the district locally.

Outlook for Year 3

The model has been modified to include special education teachers as a separate group for Strand II and to include writing scores as an additional part of Strand III, based on feedback from the Teacher and Principal Advisory Committees. The current ASPIRE Award model includes an increased award amount, funded locally by the district. HISD’s partner, Battelle for Kids, continues to conduct trainings across the district to better communicate the revised model’s objectives and payout strategy. HISD is scheduled to pay ASPIRE Awards in January 2009, using data from the 2007-2008 school year analyzed by SAS® EVAAS®.